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VA wait times for new appointments equal to or better than those in private sector

JAMA study compared four VA specialty care services with private care

WASHINGTON — A study published today in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows VA significantly reduced wait times for Veteran patients in primary care and three specialty care services between 2014 and 2017.

The study, titled [“Comparison of Wait Times for New Patients Between the Private Sector and United States Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers.”](#) compared wait times between VA and private-sector clinicians in 15 major metropolitan areas for appointments in primary care, dermatology, cardiology and orthopedics.

For all specialties except orthopedics, VA wait times were similar to private-sector wait times in 2014, and were shorter in 2017.

“Since 2014, VA has made a concerted, transparent effort to improve access to care,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This study affirms that VA has made notable progress in improving access in primary care, and other key specialty care areas.

“This progress represents another reason Veterans [Choose VA](#) for their health care, following on a [recent Dartmouth study](#) that found VA medical centers [‘outperform private hospitals in most health care markets’](#) throughout the country,” and the Partnership for Public Service ranking

VA as one of the top [6 Best Places to Work](#) in the federal government.”

According to the JAMA study, average wait time in 2014 for a VA appointment in one of these specialties was 22.5 days, compared with 18.7 days for private-sector physicians. In 2017, the average VA wait time was 17.7 days, while the private-sector average was 29.8 days. That translates to a shorter average wait time of 12 days in VA, compared with the private sector.

Primary care, dermatology and cardiology wait times were all shorter than in the private sector in 2017. While orthopedic wait times were longer for VA in both 2014 and 2017, they did decrease during the study period.

According to the study, the number of patients seen yearly in VA increased slightly between 2014 and 2017, to around 5.1 million. VA patient satisfaction has also risen, according to patient surveys cited in the study.

For more information about VA access to health care, visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits/>.

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